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The Righteous and Immortality in Wisdom of Solomon 1-5

Antonius Galih Arga W. Aryanto

Fak. Teologi, Universitas Santa Dharma, Yogyakarta

pos-el: galiharga@usd.ac.id

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Abstract: Tujuan artikel ini ialah untuk mengedepankan tesis pokok Kitab Kebijakan Salomo tentang kenyataan bahwa melalui Kebijakan, manusia mampu memahami struktur dunia dan jalan dari penghakiman Tuhan yang menuntun manusia saleh pada keabadian. Kitab Kebijakan Salomo bab 2-5 mengisahkan penganiayaan dan pembunuhan orang benar. Kematian dari orang yang setia di tangan orang jahat menuntut pada persoalan teodesis. Gagasan Yahudi tentang retribusi di dunia bahwa Tuhan yang membalas kebaikan orang saleh dan menghukum orang jahat tidak berlaku pada peristiwa bahwa orang saleh mati di tangan orang jahat di dunia. Pertanyaan mendasar muncul dari krisis tersebut apakah sesudah kematian ada pahala yang diterima orang baik. Kitab Kebijakan Salomo menjawab pertanyaan tersebut dengan meyakinkan bahwa Allah sungguh membalas orang-orang benar, terutama memperhatikan mereka yang meninggal sebelum waktunya.

Key words: Eskatologi, Imortalitas, Penghakiman, Kebijakan Salomo.

Introduction

The Wisdom of Solomon (2-5) depicts a story of persecution and murder of the righteous ones. The fundamental question arising from such a crisis is whether there is any reward after death for the faithful who have endured a time of tribulation. Wisdom answers the question by affirming that God indeed does reward the righteous, especially those who die an untimely death. The thesis of The Wisdom of Solomon is that through Wisdom, human beings understand the structure of the world and the way of God's judgment which leads them to immortality.

The Wisdom of Solomon is very compelling and essential writing from the Hellenistic Diaspora. The book was composed in Alexandria by some unknown author who knew Greek very well. The author did not indicate in his book whereby the reader could argue to a definite date of composition. The most convenient position in the recent past has been to date the book to the first-century BCE, usually after the period of the Roman conquest of Egypt in 47 BCE.¹ David Winston has pointed to some thirty-five words

¹ Lester L. Grabee, *Wisdom of Solomon* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 89-90; Daniel J. Harrington, *Invitation to the Apocrypha* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 55-56.

and usage that do not appear in Greek literature before the first century CE.² Some scholars attempt to divide Wisdom into several distinct compositions, but most agree that the work is a unit written by a single author.³

The audience and the various issues addressed in the book are often intimately connected. In wisdom 1-5, the righteous ones are obviously those who follow the Jewish tradition. The most likely audience is the educated Jewish youth of Alexandria who found the surrounding Hellenistic culture attractive and might be tempted to abandon their own culture. The author may view that the diaspora Jews, who live under the cultural hegemony of Hellenism, need to find ways for reaffirming their ancestral heritage. The Wisdom of Solomon encourages the audience to commit to the Jewish way of life.⁴

The author employs some Greek thought categories and dialectical methods that Greek Philosophers used to demonstrate the relevance of Jewish theology to the Hellenistic world. For example, the author writes, "For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness, she pervades and penetrates all things" (7:24). The verb "penetrates" and "pervades" (διηκει and χωρει) are used by stoic philosophers to describe the diffusion of the world soul.⁵ But, The Wisdom of Solomon promotes that what "penetrates" and "pervades" all things is not the world-soul of Stoics, but the God of the Jews.⁶

Method and Approach

This paper uses a "close reading" of the text of Wisdom 1-5, and attempts to find fruitful insights into the meaning of immortality. Finding the meaning of the word or phrase in its context and the structure of the passage also helps the reader understand the development of immortality and Wisdom. A

² Wisdom of Solomon has 1734 words from philosophical and scientific terms of the Hellenistic period. For example, he uses εὐστάθεια (stability, 6:24), μίμημα (copy, 9:8), σκῆνος (body, 9:15). See David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (Anchor Bible 43; Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1979), 22-23.

³ The strongest argument for the unity of the Wisdom may be drawn from its language and style. The author consistently uses the simple connection of clauses by conjunction such as και, δε, δια τουτο, δια, γαρ, and οτι. The repetitions of vocabularies and the rhetorical device of *inclusio* show the unity of the book. See David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 14-18.

⁴ David A. deSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha Message, Context, and Significance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 135-137.

⁵ Stoicism was a philosophical movement founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium in four century BCE. Stoic ideas developed alongside and in competition with Platonism and Aristotelianism over the next five hundred years. The Stoic believed that there is an active "force" (πνεῦμα) which is everywhere coextensive with the matter. For Stoic, God is fire (the active energy), and logos (reason) diffused throughout the cosmos. The energy of God is like a seed that has in itself the reason of all things and the cause of the past, the present, and the future. Energy is the vital principle from which all living beings exist in the world. In plants, the πνεῦμα gives an ability to grow and change. In humans, the force shaping power is called "reason." See Donald M. Borchert, ed., *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2006), 253-258. Internet, available from: http://0-go.galegroup.com/scuilib.scu.edu/ps/retrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=RELEVANCE&inPS=true&prodId=GV_RL&userGroupName=sant38536&tabID=T003&searchId=R1&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&contentSegment=&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=1&contentSet=GALE|CX3446801953&&docId=GALE|CX3446801953&docType=GALE&role=, accessed: 10 February 2021.

⁶ Alexander A. Di Lella, "Conservative and Progressive Theology: Sirach and Wisdom," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 28 (1966), 147-148.

comparative study of apocalyptic writing and Wisdom 1-5 also helps us discover the source of Wisdom 1-5.⁷

The life of the righteous in Wisdom 1-5

Recent studies show that Wisdom 1-5 is a part of the theme unit of Wisdom 1:1-6:21. This theme unit has a concentric composition:⁸

- A. 1:1-15: the exhortation to justice
 - B. 1:16-2:24: speech of the wicked, explaining their reasoning
 - C. 3:1-4:20: four diptychs contrasting the just with the wicked
 - B'. 5:1-23: speech of the wicked in a judgment scene
- A'. 6:1-21: the exhortation to Wisdom

These sections are woven together by verbal links between one passage and the next. The theme of death begins in 1:12-13, and then is picked up in 2:24. The righteous are introduced as subjects in 3:1 and occurs again in 5:1, 15. The word incorruption (αθαρσία) link 2:23 with 6:18-19. Therefore, this section constitutes a tightly structured and coherent argument.⁹

The first theme unit of Wisdom (chapters 1-6), which is called the book of eschatology, portrays the life of the righteous.¹⁰ It is thus named because it deals with an eternal lot of good and evil. The death of the righteous at the hand of the wicked raises the problem of theodicy. The idea of God rewarding the just and punishing the wicked does not correspond to reality, as the just continue to suffer and die. Thus, the idea of immortality functions to validate the truth of the δίκαιος' (the just's) belief. Wisdom 1-5 attempts to answer the problem of martyrdom and innocent suffering - that the righteous one who dies at the hand of evil opponents will receive a reward from God.¹¹

The author emphasizes that the role of Wisdom is to lead human beings to immortality. Wisdom is the principle of order which pervades the world and offers ultimate fulfilment for humanity. The promise of Wisdom is "life." God "created all things that they might exist, and the generative forces of the world are conducive to salvation (1:14). Traditionally, in the retributive worldview of the

⁷ Tate, W. Randolp, *Biblical Interpretation: an Integrated Approach* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publisher, 2008), 52-55.

⁸ John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in Hellenistic Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press), 182. See also Drew J. Strait, "The wisdom of Solomon, Ruler Cults, and Paul's Polemic against Idols in the Areopagus Speech," *Journal Biblical Literature* 136 (2017): 617.

⁹ The word "incorruption" is taken from the translation of the Revised Standard Version. John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in Hellenistic Age*, 183.

¹⁰ Wisdom of Solomon is usually divided into three main parts: the "book of eschatology" in 1:1-6:2, the "book of wisdom" in 6:22-10:21, and the "book of history" in chapter 11-19. See James M. Reese, "Plan and Structure in the Book of Wisdom," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27 (1965), hal.391-399; David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 10-11.

¹¹ In the books of Daniel (chapters 3 and 6), Susanna, and Esther, the righteous, is rescued from imminent death. The hero has raised to exalted status and witnesses the punishment of his or her enemy. However, in the book of Wisdom, the righteous is killed. The only vindication possible is a post-mortem one. The immortality of the soul is the solution to such a problem. See Robert J. Miller, "Immortality and Religious Identity in Wisdom 2-5," in *Reimagining Christian Origins*, ed. Elizabeth A Castelli (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Pr. Int'l, 1996), 199-207.

Deuteronomistic writings, long life is a sign of blessing from God, and it is the wicked who are punished with affliction from God. However, in *The Wisdom of Solomon*, life is not calculated on such an understanding because it is more about the quality of a life lived in the pursuit of Wisdom: "Old age is not honoured for length of time, but understanding is grey hair, and a blameless life is a ripe old age" (4:8-9).

The reward of the righteous is not spelled out in detail, but there are some general indications in *Wisdom* 3-5. Here I conduct a close reading of various texts on immortality in *Wisdom* 1-5:

1. *Wisdom* 1:14, 15

For God created all things that they might exist, and the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them; and the dominion of Hades is not on earth. For the righteousness is immortal¹²

The verse states the God created everything for the purpose of life. God did not create things in order to have them pass out of existence. The only reason death is a part of human reality is because the ungodly summoned people and made a covenant with them, "But through the devil's envy death entered the world and those who belong to the devil's party experience it" (1:16, 24). Hades is a Greek term for the world of the dead, which the author of *Wisdom* employs poetically to speak of "death".

The opening of the exhortation in 1:1-5 begins with a call to "love righteousness" (1:1), and verse 15 gives reason for doing so: "for the righteousness is immortal." Righteousness (*δικαιοσύνη*) here refers to God's righteousness, which means "God's justice." The word "righteousness" occurs as inclusion in the beginning and the end of the text. The opening consists of an imperative statement *ἀγαπήσατε δικαιοσύνην* (love righteousness), and the end gives a causal statement and explanation (because righteousness is immortal).¹³

2. *Wisdom* 2: 23

"For God created humans for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity."

The text claims that the human is called to incorruption. The word incorruption (*αφθαρσία*) alludes primarily to the elevated spiritual life of the human and includes the notion of immortality.¹⁴ "The image of his own" refers to *Genesis* 1:26-27 when God created Adam and Eve in God's own image, "So God created humankind in God's image, in the image of God, God created them; male and female God created them" (*Gen.* 1:27).

¹² The quotation is taken from Revised Standard Version (RSV).

¹³ The exhortation to love God's righteousness aims at young Jewish intellectuals who are in danger of turning aside from their religion and cultural traditions and adopting pagan ways of thinking. See Daniel J. Harrington, *Invitation to the Apocrypha*, 57-60.

¹⁴ Joseph Reider, *The Book of Wisdom* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 70. J. deWaal Dryden, "Immortality in *Romans* 2: 6-11," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 7.2 (2013): 273.

Αφθαρσία is an Epicurean term and occurs together with immortality (αθανασία) in 3:4, 8:13, 17, and 15:3.¹⁵ The word αφθαρσία designates the transcendental quality that characterizes gods. It is the power of gods to overcome forces that dissipate atoms, and makes gods survive forever. The Wisdom of Solomon uses that word as the power of God given to human beings so that they can have an eternal relationship with God. Human immortality is not part of human nature but a special gift by which God transforms humans into his own eternity.¹⁶

3. *Wisdom 3:1, 7-8*

But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the time of their visitation, they will shine forth and will run like sparks through the stubble. They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever.

The author called the evil opponents “ungodly” because they did not believe in God and intend to kill the righteous (2:20): “Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected.” Responding to the problem, the Wisdom affirms the righteous ones not to be afraid of physical death because their souls are in the hand of God. After death, those who have been faithful to God’s laws will find their reward in the next world. They are not really dead; rather, they are in peace and at rest in God’s hand. Whatever suffering and torment the righteous have endured are a discipline, “Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good” (3: 5).

4. *Wisdom 5: 15-16a*

But the righteous lives forever, and their reward is with the Lord; the Most High takes care of them. Therefore they will receive a glorious crown and a beautiful diadem from the hand of the Lord.

The texts show that the immortality of the righteous is a gift from God rather than a natural endowment (the immortal soul). This is the most explicit assertion of Wisdom that the righteous lives forever. The Wisdom of Solomon shares the similar idea with Sirach, that Wisdom confers human life into a transcendent scene. However, unlike Sirach, The Wisdom of Solomon envisages immortal life in

¹⁵ Epicurean academy was founded by Epicurus (341-270 BCE), and his academy spread throughout the Mediterranean world for seven hundred years. His purpose was to bring humankind back to happiness, and the happy society must rest on "friendship." Epicurean believed that the soul consists of atoms that act on the body. The soul formed the body, which was a mixture of fire, breath, air, and unnamed elements. No single element could be separated, nor can their capacities be divided spatially. They were the considerable powers of a single body. Soul on their own could not feel, nor even exist. See A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoic, Epicureans, Sceptics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Son, 1974), 49-56; Benjamin Farrington, *The Faith of Epicurus* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1967), XI-XIII; David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 121. Philo used the both words frequently in his writings: Αφθαρσία (*Op.* III. 192, 28; IV. 87, 7; *de Sac.* 5); αθανασία (*Op.* IV. 13; 20; VI. 81, 16). See Philonis Alexandrini, *Opera Quae Supersunt Vol. 1* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1962); Philon D’alexandrie, *De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini*. Editions du Cerf (Lyon: L’universite de Lyon, 1966).

¹⁶ James M. Reese, *The Book of Wisdom, Song of Songs* (Wilmington, DE: Michale Glazier, Inc.1983), 43.

the presence of God.¹⁷ The righteous will be accounted among the children of God, and they will receive a splendid crown from the hands of the Lord. Here, the crown and the diadem have the same meaning that the righteous will receive the highest reward after the earthly life.¹⁸

The word “immortality”, *αθανασία*, occurs seven times in Wisdom (3:4; 4:1, 8:17, and 15:3). The other word is *αφθαρσία* (incorruption), expressing the continual life not destroyed by death.¹⁹ Each of the passages simply affirms immortality without explaining bodily resurrection. Even though Wisdom does not explicitly say the resurrection of the dead, it implies that the reward of the upright will immediately occur after death (3:2-3; 4:7; 5:5, 15:5). For example, “In the eyes of the foolish, they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be an affliction, and they are going from us to be their destruction, but they are at peace” (3:2-3).

The term *αθανασία* (immortality) and *αφθαρσία* (incorruption) are adopted from the Platonic notion of the soul’s native immortality.²⁰ But, The Wisdom of Solomon uses these terms not to show immortality as a philosophical idea, but rather as a pure gift of God for those who live virtuously, “immortality brings one near to God” (6:19).²¹ In the first chapter of the book (1:1-15), the author discusses immortality completely with the framework and thoughts of Jewish religion. He encourages his audience to love righteousness (1:1), “For the righteousness is immortal” (1:15). Therefore, the teaching of immortality in Wisdom grounds in the existence of the spiritual dimension of human beings because God created human beings for incorruption and made him in the image of his own eternity.

Immortality and Wisdom

¹⁷ Even though Sirach speaks of ‘life’, it describes in a symbolic way. Wisdom “grew tall like a cedar in Lebanon and like a cypress on the height of Hermon...like a palm tree in Engedi and like rose plant in Jericho.” (24:13-14). She “went forth like a canal from a river and like a water channel into a garden” (24:30). The wise man “will be sheltered by her from the heat and will dwell in the midst of her glory” (14:27). She will come to meet him like a mother and feed him with the bread of understanding and give him the water of Wisdom to drink. He will learn on her and will not fall” (15:2-4). See John J. Collins, “The Root of Immortality: Death in the Context of Jewish Wisdom,” *Harvard Theological Review* 71 (1978), 183.

¹⁸ Diadem is the oriental form of a crown, “a band of purple silk sewn with pearls.” The idea is taken from Isaiah 62:3, “a crown of beauty and a royal diadem.” See Joseph Reider, *The Book of Wisdom*, 96.

¹⁹ The word *αφθαρσία* occurs in 2:23; 6:19.

²⁰ The platonic idea believed that soul is identified as the form of the body. The soul gives a person life as a human being. The human soul shares many of the power of other living things but has distinctive intellectual powers. The human soul is an immaterial concrete subject capable of preexisting the body and living on after the body’s destruction. See J. Wentzel Vrede van Huyssteen, ed., *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion Vol. 2* (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2003), 818-820. Internet, available from : http://0-go.galegroup.com/scuilib.scu.edu/ps/retrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=RELEVANCE&inPS=true&prodId=GV_RL&userGroupName=sant38536&tabID=T003&searchId=R2&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&contentSegment=&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=1&contentSet=GALE|CX3404200474&&docId=GALE|CX3404200474&docType=GALE&role=&docLevel=FULLTEXT, accessed: 10 February 2021.

²¹ Alexander A. Di Lella, “Conservative and Progressive Theology: Sirach and Wisdom,” 152. Richard Boyce, “Between Text and Sermon: Wisdom of Solomon 3: 1-9,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 72 (2018): 433-435.

How human beings become immortal is through the power of Wisdom. Wisdom is a spirit that loves humanity. It makes human beings become wise and friends of God. Wisdom 1:4, "because wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul nor dwell in a body enslaved to sin," implies that the recipient of Wisdom must already be righteous so that human beings will partake in the order and purpose of the universe. This participation leads human beings to enter into immortality, "giving heed to her laws is the assurance of immortality, and immortality brings one near to God" (6:18-19).

The Wisdom of Solomon develops the concept of Wisdom in the Hebrew tradition. It brings out the cosmic character of Wisdom and describes it in conceptual and scientific language. For example, Sirach says, "I (wisdom) dwelt in the highest heaven, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud, and my creator chose the place for my tent" (Sirach 24:4, 8). Sirach does not give a metaphysical explanation in this description of Wisdom. By way of contrast, The Wisdom of Solomon speaks of the indwelling of Wisdom in the human soul along with the cosmological concept of the physical universe.²² Wisdom is more mobile than any motion, and because of her pureness, she can partake of all things, including the human soul (7:7). Thus, when Wisdom enters into people, it transforms them into being just and enhances their knowledge to know the structure of the world, its working elements, and the beginning and the end of time (Wis. 6:17-20).

To know the structure of the world means that Wisdom gives knowledge of existent and the operation of the elements of the universe (7:17). Wisdom also teaches human beings the entire range of natural science (7:17-21). She is skilled in the intricacies of logic and rhetoric, and helps human beings to understand past and present experience. Above all, Wisdom is synonymous with Divine Providence. She controls historical events, and her greatest blessing is the gift of immortality (8:9-13).²³

Knowledge is the key subject in The Wisdom of Solomon because it has salvific value. King Solomon is presented as the ideal sage, a person with broad knowledge. Solomon seeks Wisdom in order to understand moral values and virtues (7:22-24), arts, cosmology, the mystery of nature, the past and the future (8:8-16). Solomon desires to make Wisdom his bridge, and "through her I (Solomon) shall have immortality" (8:13).

The fate of everyone will depend on their understanding of God and the world. The wicked are those who have false reason (2:1) and know nothing of God (2:22). Accordingly, at the time of judgment, they realize their mistake, "we erred from the path of truth, and we did not know the way of the Lord" (5:6-7). Because the wicked fail to understand God's purpose in their life, they suffer disgrace in death. Even the memory of them will disappear. The wicked will not only be condemned by God, but the force of the cosmos rejects them since God made all creation as God's weapon for the repulse of his foes (5:17). In the last judgment, they will recognize their own sins and "the unexpected salvation of the righteous" (5:2). They will want to repent, but it will be too late: "So it was we who strayed from the way of truth, and the light of righteousness did not shine on us, and the sun did not rise upon us" (5:6).

By contrast, the righteous have knowledge of God and they will live forever (5:5). Their suffering and death are the only the way to immortality. The righteous dead will judge the ungodly, "the righteous

²² John J. Collins, "Cosmos and Salvation," 131.

²³ David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 43.

who have died will condemn the ungodly who are living' (4:16). Instead of torment, death, and destruction, the righteous existence after death is glorious. They participate in God's love and truth. God will exalt the righteous to a high status in God's realm.

The power of God works in the order of the cosmos. The creator is recognized from the beauty and the magnitude of nature. From there, the righteous find the mystery of the cosmos and allows Wisdom to lead them to immortality, "for to know you is perfect righteousness and to know your might is the root of immortality" (15:3). However, the knowledge of God and immortality does not come directly from God through revelation, it comes through the cosmos. Human beings, who know the order of the universe and its structure, also will also understand the principle of God's judgment. They will live their life according to those principles.²⁴ Thus, salvation and judgment relate to the working of the world since in the world the power of God works.

The idea of immortality is extrapolated from a view of the structure of reality. The Wisdom in which the righteous participate is the principle of the cosmos. Thus, human destiny is directly related to the structure of the world. In The Wisdom of Solomon, the coherence between personal identity and cosmic order is maintained by denying that death is part of God's creation. The death of the righteous is illusory, "In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died" (3:2). The cosmic order, then, does not cover all phenomena. Death is excluded from the order of reality. Consequently, this understanding raises a problem and an ambiguity of the reality and it's presence. In fact, human beings know God from inductive ways by observing the world of appearance, "For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator" (13:5). If the psychological death of the righteous is deceptive, there will be an imminent danger that psychological life is illusory too.²⁵

Apocalypticism in Wisdom 1-5

There is a critical question on the relationship between immortality and the righteous, and what source the author uses for developing the idea. Recent studies attempt to bring together the Wisdom and apocalyptic genre in order to find a relationship between the two different genres.²⁶ Apocalypticism is generally characterized by apocalyptic eschatology. This includes the end of the world in catastrophic conditions, a resurrection, a final judgment, and then new heavens and a new earth. But that is not the

²⁴ John J. Collins, "Cosmos and Salvation," *History of Religion* 17 (1977), 121-142.

²⁵ Collin argues that Solomon's Wisdom explains the meaning of the suffering and the death of the righteous ones, since eternal life with God is the reward for them. However, the statement that the righteous' death is not real creates a problem about understanding reality and appearance. The denial of the death of the righteous leads leaders to see that the worldly appearance is not real. See John J. Collins, "The Root of Immortality: Death in the Context of Jewish Wisdom" *Harvard Theological Review* 71 (1978), 189-191.

²⁶ In 1994, Society Biblical Literature inaugurated the study of the Wisdom and the Apocalypticism in early Judaism. The study highlights the issues and questions connected with the relationship between the Wisdom and apocalypticism in early Jewish and Christian literature. See Benjamin G. Wright III and Lawrence M. Wills, eds., *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism* (Atlanta, GA: Society Biblical Literature, 2005), 1-16.

only form it might take. The transcendence of death is also at the base of apocalyptic eschatology. In other words, personal survival (an immortal soul) is also a sign of apocalypticism.²⁷

Some texts in Wisdom 3-5 connect to apocalyptic writings:

1. *Wisdom 3:7-9*

In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble. They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever. Those who trust in the Lord will understand truth, and the faithful will abide with the Lord in love, because grace and mercy are upon the Lord's elect, who watches over his holy ones.

This passage states clearly the reward for the righteous after their death, that the righteous after death become like the stars of heaven. This could imply that they become angels since stars are often thought of as angels.²⁸ Their existence after death is glorious, "they will shine forth." They participate in the realm over which God presides.²⁹ This description highlights the character of immortality as stated in Daniel 12:3: "Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."

2. *Wisdom 5: 1-8*

Nickelsburg states that the judgment scene in Wisdom 5 is modelled on the beginning of the servant in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. The structure and language scene of Wisdom 5 and the last servant poem are similar:³⁰

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Exaltation of the servant (Isa. 52:13) | A | A. Mention of exalted righteous one (Wis. 5:1a) |
| Parenthetical comment on the servant's former state (Isa. 52:14) | B | Righteous one's former state (Wis. 5:1bc) |
| Reaction of nations and kings (Isa. 52:15) | C | Reaction of persecutor (Wis. 5:2) |
| Their confession (Isa. 53:1-6) | D | Their confession (5:3-8). |

The servant poem begins with an announcement of the servant's exaltation in the sight of the nations and kings. Wisdom 5 begins with a description of the righteous one standing in the presence of the former persecutor. The servant poem then continues with a parenthetical comment about the servant's former

²⁷ Shannon Burkes, "Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Wisdom of Solomon," *The Harvard Theological Review* 95 (2002): 21- 44. Lester L. Grabbe, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 55-56.

²⁸ Lester L. Grabbe, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 56. Jack T. Sanders. Wisdom, Theodicy, Death, and the Evolution of Intellectual Tradition," *Journal of the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 36 (2005): 263-277.

²⁹ The same ideas are also found in Dan. 7:22: "and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High; and the time came, and the saints possessed the kingdom." 1 QpHab 5.4: "God will execute the judgment of the nations by the hand of his elect." It also occurs in Sir. 4:15; Matt. 19:28; 1 Cor. 6:2; and Rev. 20:4.

³⁰ G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1972), 68-92.

humiliation. Wisdom states that the righteous was despised and afflicted. The nations and the kings are astonished at the sight of the servant's unexpected exaltation. In Wisdom, the persecutors are astonished at the servant's unexpected salvation. Finally, the kings and the nations confess their former attitude toward the servant. They had despised the servant who was considered worthless (53:1-3). A confession of the persecutor in Wisdom is also attributed to the persecutors. They describe how formerly they had despised the servant.³¹

The transformation of the despised servant becomes a paradigm of the transformation of the righteous in apocalyptic literatures.³² The same paradigm also echoes in Daniel 11-12 where the martyrs of the Maccabean era made many righteous, but they suffered a great deal. In the end they are lifted up to shine like the stars in heaven. The exaltation of the righteous one as a child of God and his lot is among the holy one (Wis. 5:5) also occurs in Hebrew and Aramaic apocalyptic literature. For example, the hymnist in the *Hodayat* form Qumran: "You have purified the corrupt spirit from great sin so that it can take his place with the host of the holy ones and can enter into communion with the children of heaven" (1 QH 11:21-22).³³ The epistle of Enoch promises the righteous by saying, "you will have great joy as the angels in heaven...for you will be companions to the host of heaven" (1 Enoch 104:2-6).³⁴

Considering those parallels, Collins argues that the author likely had an apocalyptic source, possibly composed in Hebrew and/or Aramaic, that was adapted for the author's own purpose.³⁵ Like the Enochic text, The Wisdom of Solomon does not speak of a resurrection, but it envisages exaltation to the heavenly realm. It is noteworthy that the dominant expectation of afterlife in the Dead Sea Scrolls (especially *Hodayat*) also avoids resurrection language, but speaks of exaltation and fellowship with the angels.³⁶

3. *Wisdom 5:17-23*

The Lord will take his zeal as his whole armour, and will arm all creation to repel the enemies; the Lord will put on righteousness as a breastplate, and wear impartial justice as a helmet; the Lord will take holiness as an invincible shield, and sharpen stern wrath for a sword, and creation will join with him to fight against the madmen (5:17-20).

This text reveals that Wisdom 5:17-23 uses apocalyptic language. The passage describes God as Divine warrior punishing the wicked ones. God "will take his zeal at his whole armour, and will arm all creation to repel his enemies" (5:17). The text evokes the ancient image of the divine warrior who uses spiritual weapons in the battle: zeal as the panoply, righteousness as the breastplate, impartial justice as the helmet, holiness as the shield, and stern wrath as the sword (5:17-20). The Lord goes to battle and

³¹ G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism*, 62-53.

³² John J. Collins, "The Reinterpretation of Apocalyptic Traditions in the Wisdom of Solomon," in *Jewish Cult and Hellenistic Culture*, ed. John J. Collins (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2005), 145-148.

³³ Florentino Garcia Martinez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls vol. 1* (Leiden/Boston/Koln: Brill, 1997).

³⁴ James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983), 85.

³⁵ John J. Collins, "The Reinterpretation of Apocalyptic Traditions in the Wisdom of Solomon," 147.

³⁶ G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism*, 110-129.

punishes the wicked. God shows special care for the righteous, and befriends the just.³⁷ The imagery is taken from the Deuteronomy 33 and Judges 5. The closest source for the imagery in Wisdom 5 is in Isaiah 59:15-20. In that text, Yahweh sees the unjust situation and the Lord sets out to amend the situation. “The Lord put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; the Lord put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as in a mantle” (Isa. 59:17).

The description of God’s judgment against the wicked portrays the strong use of apocalyptic imagery. God strapped on armour and went out to fight his adversaries. God had shared power to rule with the just (3:8), and now shares power to judge all of creation. The extravagant apocalyptic imagery makes this scene more urgent. It shows that God is the creator who alone controls the cosmos and makes it respond to God’s care for the just.³⁸

Even though there is clear evidence that The Wisdom of Solomon employs Jewish apocalyptic sources, some differences should also be considered. First, The Wisdom of Solomon is written in the conceptual mode of philosophy and science. The book uses the personified concept of Wisdom that leads human beings to find immortality, rather than a figure such as an angel. In contrast, apocalyptic writing has supernatural persons, good and fallen angels, who have an essential role in the apocalyptic imagery.

Another contrast between Wisdom and the Apocalypse is the manner in which Wisdom is acquired. In both writings, Wisdom is a gift from God. In chapter 7, King Solomon quests the acquisition of Wisdom to give him the ability to understand. His knowledge of the universe comes from the use of his natural reasoning. On the other hand, the angelic revelations in the apocalypses acquire specific knowledge through visions and prophecies of particular events. In Wisdom, the knowledge is immanent because it is channelled through natural human thought processes, while apocalyptic revelation is ecstatic from outside the human realm.³⁹

In both wisdom and the apocalypses, the wise gain immortality because of their righteousness. However, in The Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom and the righteousness are built into the structure of the cosmos. Immortality is unbroken continuity with the order of the world where human beings live. In contrast, Wisdom and righteousness in the apocalypses are not prevalent in the cosmos. There is unbroken continuity between the earthly world and the world to come.⁴⁰

The comparison and contrast between The Wisdom of Solomon and the Jewish apocalyptic reveal essential insights into their similarities and dissimilates. Wisdom and apocalyptic differ in their styles of presentation. Wisdom uses the reflective and conceptual language of philosophy; apocalyptic employs personified language of mythology. Wisdom finds immortality and salvation through the knowledge of the world and within the process of nature. However, the apocalyptic rejects the current world order and separates the present world from the world to come.

Conclusion

³⁷ Daniel J. Harrington, *Invitation to the Apocrypha*, 62-63.

³⁸ James M. Reese, *The Book of Wisdom*, Song of Songs, 57-58.

³⁹ John J. Collins, *Cosmos and Salvation: “Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic in the Hellenistic Age,”* 139.

⁴⁰ John J. Collins, *Cosmos and Salvation: “Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic in the Hellenistic Age,”* 140.

The Wisdom of Salomon brings together the idea of the righteous and immortality through the work of Wisdom. It seems that the writer of Wisdom addresses the issue of immortality and suffering to educated Jews, so that the book employs Greek philosophical terms and dialectical approaches to convince the audience. The book has different concepts from Sirach, particularly in what Wisdom is, and how people can acquire immortality. For The Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom is not simply proverbs, instructions, or Torah. Instead, Wisdom has a cosmic dimension (as the world's soul), and personal aspects (as female figure). Sirach argues that the just finds immortality through the observance of Torah. But, The Wisdom of Solomon emphasizes immortality in connecting the human knowledge of cosmos to moral virtue. Thus, an understanding of the cosmos is the key concept of Wisdom. Knowledge and virtues will enlighten people to understand the work of the universe and God and then guide them to immortality.

The idea of immortality in Wisdom is influenced by apocalyptic literatures such as Daniel 12, Isaiah 52, and 1 Enoch 104. Although apocalyptic motifs run throughout the Wisdom of Solomon, particularly in Chapters 3-5, they are interpreted through the categories of Hellenistic philosophy. Thus, besides Jewish apocalyptic sources, the author has also incorporated much from Greek philosophical sources to construct his understanding of the relationship between righteousness and immortality. Both sources are very well embedded in Wisdom 1-5.

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